DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 284 221 CS 210 577

AUTHOR Steiner, Linda
TITLE Readers' Readings: Applications of Reader-Response Theory.
PUB DATE 1 Aug 87
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (70th, San Antonio, TX, August 1-4, 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Journalism Education; *New Journalism; Newspapers; News Reporting; News Writing; *Reader Response; *Reader Text Relationship; Reading Comprehension; Reading Research; Textbook Bias; *Theory Practice Relationship

ABSTRACT

In the interest of applying reader response theory to journalism this paper posits that readers of newspapers, like readers of literature, take an active role in making meaning from the articles they read, rather than passively accepting news as a finished, static product. Additionally, it proposes that journalism textbooks pay little attention to the role of the reader, hence affecting the way future journalists will write. Specific areas addressed in the paper are: (1) the news as narrative, which discusses two views of the structure of news stories; (2)audience approaches in cultural studies, which offers various notions of how audiences go about interpreting news articles; (3)literary reader response theories; (4) inter-media differences, which examines the differences in roles of readers of literature and viewers of film and television; (5) the role of readers in journalism textbooks; and (6) "New Journalism" as metalanguage. The paper concludes that by incorporating reader response theory in journalism education, and changing the way journalists think, they may come to understand how readers differ from one another, how they differ from reporters, and how reporters and readers together make meaning, while the study of the linguistic and conceptual forms used by real people to give meaning to their situations would offer journalists new rhetorical tools. (Endnotes and a 53-item bibliography are appended.) (JC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED284221

READERS' READINGS:

APPLICATIONS OF READER-RESPONSE THEORY

Linda Steiner

Governors State University
University Park, Illinois

Presented to the Qualitative Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, TX, August, 1987.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Linda Steiner

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS210577

Reader's Readings:
Applications of Reader-Response Theory

Linda Steiner
Governors State University
(312) 534-5000

This paper applies reader-response literary theory to journalism. Specifically, it examines the extent to which readers' active participation in meaning-making is taken seriously by journalism textbooks.

Reader response theory taken alone is too naive about power struggles to be entirely useful to journalism scholars, but particular versions of the theory, offer important suggestions about readers' communally creative activities, even with respect to nonfiction.

Journalism textbooks, for the most part, ignore readers. Although they acknowledge the debate over objectivity, it is only reporters who interpret, and then "tell readers what happened."

Presented to the Qualitative Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, Texas, August 1, 1987.

LS/d

READERS' READINGS:

APPLICATIONS OF READER-RESPONSE THEORY

The well-known attack on the notion of journalistic objectivity radically undermined conventional understandings of the nature of reporting. But although the story-seeking obligation of journalists and the "story-ness" of newspaper articles have been thoroughly exposed, the full consequences of recognizing the subjectivity of journalism have not been completely developed. This paper will trace one implication of this notion of news as narrative: the potential for applying literary theory to journalism.

This application may seem retrogressive; although literary schools were once accepted as applying to mass media texts, at least the "New Criticism" version is now mocked as elitist, accused of denying its theoretical status, and rejected for ignoring social-political context.1 There is a long tradition of media scholars regularly appropriating, refining, but ultimately repudiating various literary theories (Strine, 1985).

Nonetheless, cultural studies, at least, has consciously attempted to connect and draw from both humanities and social sciences (Newcomb, 1984). I argue that one development in literary theory--emphasizing how readers create literary meaning--is relevant to mass media to an extent not yet appreciated. Furthermore, even those mass communication theories which recognize audiences' roles with respect to other cultural works such as television programming, films, and music, rarely take up journalism. But newspaper readers, too, actively participate in a dynamic process of creating meaning.

Reader-response theory is a term not used by any single school of criticism, but embracing a number of American theories, the most influential being Stanley Fish's affective stylistics, Jonathan Culler's structuralist poetics, Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological criticism, David Bleich's subjective criticism, and Norman Holland's transactive criticism. Instead of describing each of these, this paper will focus on Fish; his repudiation of the myth of the objective, autonomous text seems to me the most forthright and convincing. I will highlight those aspects of reader-response theory that seem most useful to media studies, especially when combined with existing cultural studies theory (described below). Specifically, this theory offers a corrective to media professionals' chronic arrogance about their effectivity and their centrality in making meaning. Reporters, editors, and publishers should be more self-critical and modest, and should regard readers as actively making meaning from stories; readers do not simply passively receive objective and already-finished articles.

Secondly, this paper will also examine the extent to which journalism textbooks acknowledge newspaper readers' creative activities; for reader-response theory raises important pedagogical questions.

One caveat is necessary before proceeding, for reader-centered theory does not alone provide a complete account of interpretation. As this paper will show, in their present form reader-response theories are politically naive about hegemonic processes, about power and about ideological struggle; thus, it is less useful than critical studies for understanding how mass media function in the production and maintenance of social formations. Perhaps because novelists and poets more often openly invite readers to work with subtle layers of meaning, literary

critics fail to recognize how individuals and institutions try--partially succeeding--to control audiences by dictating meaning.

I acknowledge from the outset that some media scholars, particularly John Fiske, have, independently of literary theory, developed extremely sophisticated audience-centered approaches. Referring only to television (for reasons to be discussed later), Fiske calls for a "reader's liberation movement," which would assert readers' right to make programs into texts that "connect the discourse" of programs with the discourses through which they live out social experience (1986a, p. 207). On the other hand, these media critics ignore the potential contributions of literary theory and they ignore print media altogether. I aim for a more integrated approach, both by reinserting literary theory into the dialogue and by collapsing, for the purposes here, distinctions now drawn between novels and news, between television and newspapers; all should be seen dialectically.

NEWS AS NARRATIVE

The notion of "news as narrative" has been central in two forms of analysis. Michael Schudsen (1982) and Gaye Tuchman (1976) regard the structural conventions and the selectivity of reporting as inevitable symbolic human constructions.[2] Schudson emphasizes how journalists' narrative conventions (inverted pyramid, summary lead, etc.) tell readers what to attend to and how to attend to it; his point is that journalists will understand media, and politics, better when they recognize the substantive message and substantial authority of narrative forms. But although Schudson may be right that journalists little understand how they are controlled by these forms, he may exaggerate the extent to which readers yield to this authority (198).

On the other hand, Edward J. Epstein (1973) deplores "dramatic" elements of news reporting as debasing journalists' traditional commitment to truth and accuracy. Others similarly claim that narrative structures of news stories regularly "disguise" standard ideological content without introducing new or constructive insights--although they can imagine creative non-distorting use of some new journalistic narrative (Bennett and Edelman, 1985).

Either way, both schools assume that stories are constructed by reporters (and their institutions), and then distributed as stable products to passive undifferentiated readers. Put another way, both analyses of rhetorical strategies used by journalists in telling stories, and analyses of ideological or institutional pressures on reporters ultimately construe publications as static products.

AUDIENCE APPROACHES IN CULTURAL STUDIES

Although they reject the positivist behaviorism of the "effects models," most cultural studies researchers also focus on media texts without reference to readers. While the effects of mass media are still debated, their texts are typically regarded as important, as "powerful." Samuel Becker criticizes much of cultural studies for failing to grapple with how and when (or if) audience members play an active role in the sense-making process (1986, p. 13).[3]

An important example of this trend in cultural studies is Stuart Hall's willingness to concede hypothetically the potential creativity of the audience, but then discount it. Hall's model of communications involves a "complex structure in dominance," sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments--production, circulation, distribution/ consumption, reproduction (1980, p. 128). He explains

that before a mediated message can have an "effect," it must be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. Since encoding and decoding are rarely perfectly symmetrical, "perfect communication," or perfectly transparent communication, is highly unlikely.

Hall proposes three hypothetical decoding positions (dominant, negotiated, oppositional) available to audiences. But according to Hall, encoding generally, although not always, defines the limits and parameters within which decodings operate. More importantly, all codes are not equal. Hall assumes that society will, with varying degrees of closure, impose its classifications, and that audiences will generally operate inside the dominant code, decoding the message the way it was encoded. Furthermore, and this is important for the argument to be made later, Hall assumes that the subculture choosing to decode oppositionally has first understood the author-intended meanings.

John Corner agrees that textual and contextual mechanisms push the consumer toward the "preferred reading." Rejecting both pluralism and polysemy as vague notions, Corner assumes that understandings of what a text "says" rarely differ significantly (1980,1983).4

Larry Grossberg, on the other extreme, says, "The meaning of a text is always the site of a struggle....No single interpreter, including the producer of the text, can have a privileged, authoritative relationship to the text" (1986, p.86) He essentially minimizes the control of producer encoding.

Horace Newcomb stresses the "dialogic aspects" of mass communication, the multi-vocality of language. Building on the work of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin and linguist V.N.Volosinov, Newcomb

argues that mass media texts provide a "site for imaginative possibility," that is, symbolic space in which consumers can produce, reproduce and change society. Newcomb claims that while an author might try to establish hegemony, this can never be fully successful; intentions of the originator are refracted by the contexts of reception (1984, p. 40). Newcomb's own analyses, nonetheless, concentrates on textual forms and structures (he looks at television).

Empirical applications and extensions of Hall by Fiske and David Morley show communication to be somewhat less hegemonically determined than Hall would suggest, yet not idiosyncratic, not as free-floating as Grossberg suggests. For Fiske and Morley, the appropriate analytic unit is the subculture or group. While the texts may be created in such a way that they validate and naturalize the dominant ideology, they are still open to divergent readings by subcultures. At the least, Morley's empirical investigation of Hall's categories demonstrates that several more (than three) decoding positions can be identified; although class position partly structures the availability of discursive strategies, decoding choices cannot be reduced to economic status. But Morley and Fiske are not specifically interested in how groups "read."

In general, then, most media scholars are more interested in what texts do, rather than what readers do. They have not attempted to explain the process of reading/interpreting. So, what Fish accuses formalist literary critics of doing to readers might also be said of media critics: "[Readers] are ignored because the text is taken to be self-sufficient--everything is in it--and they are devalued because when they are thought of at all, they are thought of as the disposable machinery of extraction." (1980, p.158)

Reader response theories may be applied to media precisely because they do theorize why and how readers make meaning.5 I will now proceed to show how this conception is grounded in a plausible understanding of language which avoids the mechanistic vocabulary and assumptions of the "broken circuit" model of communication still current; yet it avoids getting trapped into the unacceptable conclusion that interpretation must be infinitely pluralistic and individually subjective.

LITERARY READER-RESPONSE THEORIES

Anthologies of literary theory and the work of individual theorists demonstrate that notions of a stable, "objective," self-sufficient text have only gradually been abandoned. But Stanley Fish has emphatically dislodged the text as a "privileged container of meaning." Readers' interpretive strategies give texts their shape, their meaning. That is, meanings are not extracted, but created--by the interpretive strategies that call forms into being. Interpretation is the source (not result) of texts, facts, authors, intentions (Fish, 1980).6 Thus Fish provides a grounds for a reader-focussed (rather than author-focussed) understanding of why objectivity is impossible: here the notion of subjectivity implies both that meaning cannot reside outside the text, and that one cannot read without interpreting. Barthes puts this quite simply: a work is a physical construct, made up of signifiers; it only becomes a text when it is read.

Fish's model is very temporal. Anticipation and subsequent reading and re-readings all influence interpretation; each reading is creative. Wolfgang Iser proposes the phrase "wandering viewpoint" to describe how reading is informed by continually modified expectations as well as transformed memories (1980).

Reader-centered theorists must explain why some groups of readers will interpret an author's word differently from others and why particular reader may also "perform" differently at different moments. Initially, Fish simply posited that "informed readers," sharing linguistic and literary "competence," would have similar reading experiences. Fish later substituted the notion of "interpretive communities"--comprised of people who share interpretive conventions or strategies for "writing" texts. Individuals may belong to several communities or move from one to another; communities may grow larger or smaller. And it is from these interpretive communities that meaning-making strategies and evaluative standards proceed; they are "community property" (1980, p.14). Fish thus escapes the accusation leveled against "reception theory," another reader-centered school (associated with the University of Konstanz), which sees reading as more private and individualized. Fish does not authorize infinite meanings or standards for criticism; readers are not individually "free agents."

Fish, not a sociologist, obviously ducks more precise definition and categorization of these communities. He cannot explain how these communities originate. But Hall's original notion of decoding positions as class-based certainly appears limited. Fiske and Morley go farther than Hall but present no final answer, except that decodings are "determined by the socially governed distribution of cultural codes" (Morley, 1983, p.106). In theory they emphasize subcultural groups, but in practice do little more than divide people up by sex, race, and class, and then assume that readings are patterned by structure of access to different discourses, in turn determined by social position. Yet membership in or commitment to different discourses may be much more

subtle and complex than Morley's mechanical language accommodates. On the other hand, these scholars have the advantage of a more socially--or sociologically--defined definition of what is obviously a social practice; and they correctly incorporate, as Fish does not, the element of power.

INTER-MEDIA DIFFERENCES

Although this paper does not examine various other theories grouped under the reader-response umbrella, it should be noted that Iser's phenomenological approach to reading has very different implications. Iser stresses the dynamic interaction of text and reader's imagination; although the text imposes certain constraints, precisely because it activates readers' imaginations, readers endow the text with greater significance.

Iser comments, "As the reader uses the various perspectives offered him by the text in order to relate the patterns and the 'schematised views' to one another, he sets the work in motion, and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself. Thus, reading causes the literary work to unfold its inherently dynamic character" (1980, p. 51) Iser's readers create meaning by filling in gaps in the text. In other words, what Virginia Woolf said of Jane Austen ("She stimulates us to supply what is not there. What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, yet is composed of something that expands in the reader's mind....") is what any good author would do.

Holub says that Iser, by reintroducing textual determinacy, has painted himself into a "theoretic corner" (1984, p. 150). Even more important and perhaps fatal is Iser's insertion of the word "good."

Iser predicts that the explicitness of didactic texts makes us "want to free ourselves from their clutches" (1980, p. 53). When authors make everything cut and dried, readers have nothing to "do;" they are uninvolved and bored. Iser believes this is why a novel might be preferred over its cinematic version.

Iser, then, raises the question of whether text-reader interaction is intrinsic to reading, or whether it occurs only with "good" literature. And this bears on the question of whether the literary theory can apply to routine journalism, which prides itself on its cut and dried clarity, if not didacticism.

Other literary and media scholars also believe that film and television, by resolving all questions, are structurally less stimulating and ultimately less satisfying than print. Wayne Booth, for example, notes that if one stops watching a television program, the show goes on. Audience members are not necessary to complete the action, have no opportunity to change anything; they are merely "tourists" in television country. "Reading a story, in contrast, I must be engaged with it at every moment, or it simply stops....This country needs me," he says (1982, p. 40).

It is worth noting that Marshall McLuhan, whose analysis of "hot" and "cool" media seems, in light of contemporary discussion, both counter-intuitive and counter-experiential, argued in the opposite direction. He insisted that because books and radio are structurally linear and highly defined, they require little audience involvement. In contrast, he saw television as a mosaic, thus requiring audience participation. Curren

t media scholars typically assume that only some media messages are

susceptible to interpretation, or that only good ones are. For example, in an article "Television: Polysemy and Popularity," Fiske says that, in order to be popular, television texts must contain contradictions or gaps that viewers can exploit in order to discover structural similarities to their own social identities. "In order to be popular, television must reach a wide diversity of audiences, and, to be chosen by them, must be an open text....It must therefore be polysemic" (1986b, p. 392). He sees film as less open, more authoritarian (1986a. 1986b).

Fiske, moreover, criticizes deconstructionists for locating the openness of television in the natural polysemy of language, rather than the differing experiences of social groups. I contend that one needs to consider both the inherent polysemy of language (especially at the level of whole texts considered in their whole contexts, rather than at the level of words) and the social dimension of interpretation. Secondly, no medium should be seen as transmitting wholly closed messages, although some media forms may "play" with conventions more than others, providing more open invitations to interpret and more opportunities for readers to relate "content" to their own experiences.

Fish's denial that literature can be defined by way of formal properties does provide, unlike the theories of either Fiske or Iser, grounds for application to journalism. Fish's point is that literature is a product of a way of reading--of a community agreement about what will count as literature, which in turn leads members of the community to pay a certain kind of attention and thereby to create literature. He notes that a way of reading literature is not eternally fixed; it will vary across space and time.7 As noted before, many journalism theorists have followed Fish in abandoning the distinction

between "literary" and "informational" (that is,representational, message-bearing, objective) language. Thus, although community agreements about what constitutes reporting are substantively different from ones about literature, reading is always an activity, one accomplished in and by readers. For example, in language parallel to Fish's, one media scholar has pointed out, "A reader produces information by confronting the report as a symbolic structure which conforms to conventional expectations that the report contains information" (Eason, 1981).

But media scholars have not gone very far inserting readers into the reading process. The fact that readers must be taught the conventions of journalism does not mean that ultimately readers are not essentially active meaning-makers. The irony is that while universities spend a great deal of time teaching students how to read literature and how to write journalism, they devote much less time to teaching how to write literature and how to read journalism.

In sum, the creative activity of interpretive communities has important consequences for communication study. But reader-response theory does not work on its own, given its failure to account for the often successful attempts of institutional producers to privilege a particular reading. One critic of Fish already asserted, "[Fish's] theory lacks a politically charged vocabulary, which would reveal 'interpretation' to be a system of difficult, even violent, exchanges, with forced entrances of new communities and exclusions of old ones" (Cain, 1981, p. 86). By this Cain is referring to battles for authority among and within interpretive communities (and given the defensive posture of various schools of literary theory, this orientation is not

surprising). But one should also account for the ideological work performed by mass media producers.

READERS IN JOURNALISM TEXTBOOKS

To investigate the extent to which the role of readers is incorporated into discussions of newswriting, this paper examines how readers and reading are treated in fifteen recently published college-level newswriting textbooks.

Basically, as this analysis will demonstrate, authors of journalism textbooks ignore the reading process. Although they acknowledge the debate over objectivity, they allow only reporters to interpret, not readers. Readers "get" texts, not "interact" with them. Harriss, Leiter and Johnson's seven-step explanation of "the story process," for example, ends when newspapers are delivered to homes or sales points.

This is particularly ironic given that journalism textbooks are so wholly dedicated to the model of urban dailies, that is, papers aimed at heterogenous mass audiences whose political orientations and social experiences undoubtedly vary in many respects. Conversely these textbooks marginalize alternative presses and special interest magazines, where one might more plausibly argue that reporters can rely on addressing a single-minded, narrowly defined community which does share an interpretive strategy.

Although the textbooks may define news in terms of certainly of "community" interests, some textbooks minimize even this reference, apparently fearing that emphasizing audiences will appear to "pander" to audiences, or will appear to justify market approaches. Izard et al, for example, concede that many papers systematically study audience

consumption habits, but recommend balancing professional instincts and "audience-oriented schools of thought" in determining what is news.[8]

A few books, openly espousing "nuts and bolts" approaches, wholly ignore readers. MacDougall boasts of his "old-fashioned approach" stressing mastery of basic principles of reporting and writing.9 MacDougall acknowledges that reporters must have a "nose" for what will interest readers. But although he notes that AP and UPI may disagree on what a year's biggest stories are (p. 13-14), he implies a monolithic readership.

Hohenberg discusses in detail "the reporter's work" (one chapter describes "The Lives of a Reporter"). But readers are excluded symbolically from his definition of the purposes of newswriting--"to communicate information, opinions and ideas in an interesting and timely manner. Stories must be accurate, terse, clear and easily understood" (p.42).

Indeed, all the textbooks stress clear, plain language that, as Fedler puts it, "every reader is able to understand" (p. 27) Fedler also notes that readability is a matter of word difficulty and sentence length; hence: "Simplify Words, Sentences and Paragraphs." Referring to some infamously ambiguous headlines ("Squad Helps Dog Bite Victim"), Fedler says, "Readers often consider the double meanings humorous, but few editors are amused when <u>errors</u> appear in their newspapers" (p. 33, emphasis added).

Hohenberg concedes that certain apparently simple words have varying meanings, depending on the audience (for example, "bread" as food or money). His point about clear writing is one emphatically and consistently made in all journalism textbooks: "It is not enough for

writers to be understood. They should be certain that they are not misunderstood" (p. 61-62).10

My point is not that textbooks are wrong to recommend "clear" and "simple" writing, but that it is misleading to imply that if reporters write in the way they believe is precise and clear, all readers will derive the same message. These textbooks already concede that different reporters may understand events differently; the time has come to acknowledge that readers may read differently. Given readers' diversity in terms of social experiences, education, knowledge, political philosophy, journalists cannot control reading. Secondly, although these textbooks rightly concede that "people attach distinct meanings to certain words because of their emotional or cultural backgrounds" (Dennis, p. 38), differences in meanings inhering in the application of opposing interpretive strategies do not show up so much at the level of individual words, but at the level of the text/article read as a whole (and again, reader in differing contexts).

This also applies to interviewing itself. Sources may interpret reporters' questions in ways not intended; and that reporters may interpret answers in ways not intended/realized/desired by sources.

Hill and Breen comment that their own student readers, even if they never work for a newspaper, may still "report," "write," and "edit." That is, everyone will talk to people, do research, think, and make judgments and decisions. But Hill and Breen construe this in terms of talking, researching, and deciding about other things (buying cars, for example), not making decisions about the implications of news stories they read. They advise would-be journalists to "Tell the Reader What Happened."

Mencher frequently refers to readers, but they are seen monolithically, at least within a particular geographic community. Typical comments are "When explanation and interpretation are lacking, the reader is left with questions" (p. 273); or "The reporter does his or her best to give the reader, viewer and listener the truth of the event, and the public presumes that the reporter's account is honestly and fully reported and is accurately written. This agreement is important, for people act on what they read and hear" (p.4).

But Mencher not only sees readers "acting" on the basis of a stable and objective artifact, but unable to observe (or by implication, interpret for themselves). Explaining why reporters should not rely on second or third-hand information, Mencher says that casual observers are not trained to see and hear accurately, and lack reporters' commitment to reveal truth (p. 255).

Mencher and several others stress the importance of "knowing the community," and developing a feeling for what readers need and want to know. But his community is one strictly of geography, and is thus presumed internally homogenous. Rivers' analogous section on "The Importance of the Audience," includes the difference of writing for a campus newspaper, daily newspaper, national magazine and so forth.

A somewhat more audience-conscious version is offered by Friedlander. He complains that most news organizations lack effective mechanisms for handling "consumer communications," which is "the key way reporters learn about problems with their stories" (p. 24).

While Friedlander notes that readers may feel that reporters are being condescending, it appears that Friedlander condescends. Friedlander says, "The reporter tells the reader what is important about

the facts, what the facts mean. Often this is desirable, because the reporter has a better perspective on the facts and can more accurately interpret what the facts mean than can the reader." Then he adds that readers may not like being told what to think; and that, if interpretation predominates over facts, they may see reporters being arrogant (p.256).

His alleged "cure" for reporters' chronic tendency to arrogance raises one issue where these textbooks disagree: their image of who readers are. Friedlander says, "[Y]ou are writing for readers who have needs, who pay for your product, and who will not buy it any more if those needs are not met. One way to do this is to imagine a typical reader. Picture an aunt or an uncle, a brother or a sister, and writer for that person. If your story doesn't interest your aunt, it may bore most of your readers" (p. 10).

Brooks et al, however, while noting that "Like snowflakes, no two audiences are identical" (p.16), describe newspaper readers generally as "people with homes to maintain, children to educate, taxes to pay...[rooted in the community] and interests that reflect those roots" (p.7). Both these views can be contrasted with more explicitly monolithic references to "average" readers (Crump, p. 96).

One surface implication of the discussion here is that reporters ought to think about their readers, and not assume that articles are finished products merely to be distributed to passive readers. On the other hand, the presumption that one merely has to imagine one's aunt or brother, or taxpayers, critically belies the variety of social circumstances and experiences that newspaper readers inevitably bring to interpretation. Again, this is particularly problematic given that

these textbooks are so dedicated to "massified" media, devaluing special interest papers.

It is worth mentioning that in 1959, Ithiel de Sola Pool claimed newspaper reporters either saw their articles as unpopular weapons against "the bad guys;" or reporters had fantasies about winning affection from friendly readers who read with pleasure. De Sola Pool concluded, "The audience, or at least those audiences about whom the communicator thinks, thus plays more than a passive role in communication." These audiences (references groups or, using Cooley's term, "imaginary interlocutors") "enter the author's flow of associations at the time of composition and influence what he writes or says" (1959, p. 145).

Whether or not it is true, some literary theorists have also assumed that editors and journalists "thought about" audiences. For example, in an essay first published in 1950, Walker Gibson described the "mock reader," an artifact "whose mask and costume the individual takes on in order to experience the language" (1980, p. 2). Assuming that editors, no less than novelists, would articulate for themselves a mock reader, Gibson defined "editorial policy" as prediction about the roles in which one's consumers would imagine themselves.11

In contrast, recalling his own New York Times experiences at about the same time (1959-64), Robert Darnton rejected de Sola Pool's findings. According to him, writers' primary reference group consists of other writers, sources, and editors. "We really wrote for one another," he says, emphasizing the brutal competition dominating the status-conscious newsroom (1975, p. 176).

New York Times reporters told Darnton their editors expected them to aim stories at a mythical 12 year old girl, who became their only 'audience image.' But Darnton says "she merely functioned as a reminder that we should keep our copy clear and clean" (1976, p. 176). Moreover, regardless of this "subliminal image," Darnton saw reporters having very little contact with the public.12

The problem is not that standardized techniques of telling stories influence reporters' writing process, that the encoding is determined by cultural preconceptions of news (and Darnton also makes this point). That reporters primarily write for each other--merely keeping an eye out for the taste and intelligence of 12 year olds--may, however, be problematic. But the fact that reporters seldom take readers seriously is not surprising, given that journalism textbooks teach a misleading view of reading.

"NEW JOURNALISM" AS META-LANGUAGE

If journalism's story-telling epistemology, including readers' involvement, has been at all recognized by scholars or practitioners, it has been in the context of New Journalism. David Eason describes New Journalism as a meta-language that challenges the assumptions of routine journalism and highlights the subject-object relationships necessary to create the "report" (1982). Tom Wolfe, who wrote one of the first books on and of New Journalism, himself commented that print doesn't so much create images as "jog" reader' memories; thus, reporter and reader jointly produce a reality. Wolfe said that writers try to "create within the mind of the reader an entire world that resonates with the reader's own real emotions" (p. 47-49).

Eason shows that New Journalists were unique in self-consciously underlining the existence of world views (other than their own) that constitute reality, in making visible reporters' role in constructing a reality, and in calling attention to discourse as a mode for interpretation. Although it has become a cliche to talk about self-rerferential texts, New Journalism provides a lesson about journalism more generally as a mode for seeing and knowing the world (1982). It may be added that New Journalism upsets routine expectations about reporting by both blurring the distinction of reporter and object (treating sources as do anthropologists) and by bringing into focus the relationship of reporter and subject (treating readers as do novelists). But these processes, to one degree or another, are ongoing in all journalism.

In other words, the notion of reading as grounded in the acceptance of symbolic conventions and of readers as constructing reality based on the cues given in reports has been at least partially acknowledged in New Journalism. This insight should be extended to more traditional forms of journalism pedagogy as well as scholarship. Even New Journalism has not acknowledged the subjectivity of reading to the extent it understands the subjectivity of writing; it, too, needs a theory of reading a la Fish. And practitioners of both forms should anticipate the possibility that groups of readers may not see things in the ways reporters authorize.13

CONCLUSION

Although this paper began by suggesting that the evolving understanding of journalism as narrative paves the way for application of recent literary theory, it should now be clear that this notion of

reading and readers has less to do with story-telling models per se and more with the the centrality of readers in creating meaning.

I am not pleading for market research. Nor am I offering a jeremiad against clear, precise, economical writing or fair and balanced news reporting. I do encourage reporters to be modest about their "effects." Reporters should know that, even after they have struggled to write a story, they cannot control all its meanings. They should be reminded of the diversity among their readers, including (but this is not an exhaustive list) their cultural, social, ethnic, political, and class differences. Defining "community" strictly in geographic terms is certainly inadequate. The solution to journalistic arrogance is not to imagine some one typical reader (or even several) but to concede how readers may differ, how readers may be different from reporters, and how they jointly make meaning.

One issue still left open is how journalists might operationalize their sincere acknowledgement of readers; it might be that reporters could discover and put into print certain "cues" that would openly invoke the readers' role.14 But even if newsreporting and writing do not in themselves change, it would be significant if reporters were to "think" differently. And the place to begin to make such points is in journalism classrooms and textbooks.

Finally, the suggestion that journalism education incorporate the essential points of reader-response theory is only one, and perhaps the most obvious, example of how current literary theory can be useful in mass media discussions. One need not resort to the uses and gratifications model, now clearly discarded because it assumed a monolithic psychology, in order to reinsert audiences into the study of

various popular cultural forms and processes. Janice Radway, who found Fish's notion of interpretive communities very useful in her ethnography of romance novel readers (1984) and whose book is a model for reader-centered research, notes the political implications of the approach: "By uncovering the linguistic and conceptual forms used by real people to give order and meaning to the material situation in which they find themselves, such study can empower us rhetorically with new tools" (1986, p. 118).

ENDNOTES

1. John Fiske, for example, asserts that tools of literary criticism simply do not "fit" television (1978, 1986a).

2. Tuchman asserts "Reports of news events are stories--no more, but no less" (1976,p.93) But she sees the "constructed reality of news" as one constructed by professional journalists, constrained by cultural resources and organizational processes.

3. Becker adds that one problem--constituting a danger to democratic society--in this body of scholarship is the "total displacement of responsibility for the construction of meanings and, hence, the construction of culture, from each individual to an amorphous society or economic structure" (1986, p. 14). Presumably, if there were displacement, scholarly practices are not the primary cause. But the more fundamental question is whether displacement has occurred.

4. Clearly what constitutes a "significant" difference for one critic is trivial for another. But I argue that before one can decide whether interpretations vary significantly, one must at least be willing to ask the question.

5. Although primarily aiming at "literature" as traditionally defined, one German literary theorist, Hans Jauss, in a 1969 essay, called for a new paradigm for history that could equally account for "high class" literature as well as popular literature and mass media products (Holub, 1984, p.4). Iser himself has applied his theory to spectators of drama (1981).

6. Holub claims Fish's argument about the relation of membership in a community and patterns of reading is circular, a problem he says can only be avoided by seeing criticism as a creative act (1984). But while Fish does not use the "misinterpretation" language of someone like Harold Bloom, Fish does present interpretation not as secondary or derivative, but as productive.

7. It might be explained here that the eponymous anecdote of Fish's book derives from a question that one of Fish's former students asked of another professor: "Is there a text in this class?" He answered "yes" and gave the title. But apparently she meant whether, in contrast to Fish, this professor believed in texts. (The answer was still yes.) My point is that the student's question seems to be fairly straightforward , but even this rather "ordinary" language showed itself as ambiguous.

8. Although indices may not be the best indication of what textbook authors deem important, it is worth mentioning that if these textbooks' indices list "reading," it means a list of good writers, books or newspapers that ambitious reporters should read. These indices generally have no listing for "readers."

9. He claims that discussions of ethical problems and journalism history do not solve "a beginner's quest for specific instruction in how to do a good job" (p. vi).

10. Crump makes a slightly different point, that readers' understandings and impressions will come only from the story itself, since reporters will not be present to explain any vagueness or confusion (p.96).

11. The role of implied or mock readers is very different from that of actual readers, but the former concepts anticipate reader-centered approaches to texts.

12. It may be worth noting that Darnton, in calling for scholarship on the history books, recently proposed a model of "the communications circuit" which prominently features readers. Since literature is an activity, not a canon of texts, he praises literary scholars who take reading as a central concern (1982).

13. There is both an affective and a cognitive element to this, as well. So although New Journalist refer to their attempts to connect with readers' emotions, both forms engage readers' emotions and beliefs.

14. I am indebted to Roger Gilman, a poet and professor of philosophy, for this point; he suggests that use of metaphor might be such a way to acknowledge readers' complicity in meaning-making. I am also grateful for his helpful comments on other sections of this paper.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Becker, Samuel L. (1986). "Rhetoric, Media and Culture." paper presented to the Speech Communications Association, Chicago, IL.

Bennett, W. Lance and Murray Edelman (1985). "Toward a New Political Narrative." Journal of Communication 35:156-71

Booth, Wayne C.(1982). "The Company We Keep: Self-Making in Imaginative Art, Old and New." Daedalus. 111(4):33-60

Brunsdon, Charlotte, and David Morley (1978). Everyday Television: "Nationwide." London: British Film Institute.

Cain, William E. (1981). "Constraints and Politics in the Literary Theory of Stanley Fish." Bucknell Review 26(1):75-88.

Corner, John (1980). "Codes and Cultural Analysis." Media, Culture & Society 2:73-86.

Corner, John (1983). "Textuality, communication and media power." in Language, Image, Media. Ed. by Howard Davis and Paul Walton. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 266-281.

Darnton, Robert (1975). Writing News and Telling Stories." Daedalus 104(2):175-194.

Darnton, Robert (1982). "What is the History of Books?" Daedalus. 111(3):65-84.

Eason, David L. (1981). "Telling Stories and Making Sense." Journal of Popular Culture 15(2): 125-129.

Eason, David L.(1982). "New Journalism, Metaphor and Culture" Journal of Popular Culture. 15(4):142-149.

Eco, Umberto (1979). The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Epstein, Edward J. (1973). News From Nowhere. New York: Random House.

Fish, Stanley (1980). Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities. Cambridge: Harvard

Fiske, John (1986a). "Television and Popular Culture: Reflections on British and Australian Critical Practice." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 3: 200-16.

Fiske, John (1986b). "Television: Polysemy and Popularity." Critical Studies in Mass Communication. 3(4) 391-408.

Fiske, John and John Hartley (1978). Reading Television. London: Methuen.

Gibson, Walker (1980) "Authors, Speakers, Readers and Mock Readers." in Jane Tomkins, ed. Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. pp. 1-6.

Grossberg, Lawrence (1986). "Reply to Critics." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 3: 86-95.

Hall, Stuart (1977). "Culture, the Media and the Ideological Effect." In J. Curran et. al. (eds.) Mass Communication and Society. London: Edward Arnold, pp. 315-48.

Hall, Stuart (1980). "Encoding/decoding." In S. Hall, et al. (eds,) Culture, Media, Language. London: Hutchinson.

Holub, Robert C. (1984). Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction. New York: Methuen.

Iser, Wolfgang (1980). "The Reading Process: A phenomenololgical Approach." in Jane Tomkins, ed. Reader-Response Theory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 50-69.

Iser, Wolfgang (1981). "The Art of Failure: The Stifled Laugh in Beckett's Theater." Bucknell Review 26(1):139-89.

Mailloux, Steven (1982). Interpretive Conventions: The Reader in the Study of American Fiction. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Morley, David (1974). "Reconceptualising the Media Audience: Towards an Ethnography of Audiences. Stencilled paper, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham.

Morley, David (1983). "Cultural Transformations: the politics of resistance." in Language, Image, Media. Ed. by Howard Davis and Paul Walton. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp.104-117

Newcomb, Horace M. (1984). "On the Dialogic Aspects of Mass Communication." Critical Studies in Mass Communication 1:34-50

Pool, Ithiel de Sola and Irwin Shulman (1959). "Newsmen's Fantasies, Audiences, and Newswriting." Public Opinion Quarterly. 23(2):145-158.

Radway, Janice (1984). Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Radway, Janice (1986). "Identifying Ideological Seams: Mass Culture, Analytic Method, and Political Practice." Communication. 9(1): 93-123.

Schudson, Michael (1982). The Politics of Narrative Form: The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television. Daedalus 111(4):97-112.

Strine, Mary S.(1985). "The Impact of Literary Criticism." Critical Studies in Mass Communication. 2:167-175.

Suleiman, Susan R and Inge Crosman (1980). The Reader in the Text: Essays in Audience and Interpretation. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tuchman, Gaye (1976). "Telling Stories." Journal of Communication 26 (4):93-97.

Tuchman, Gaye (1978). Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality. New York: Macmillan Publishers.

Weber, Max (1910, 1976). "Toward a Sociology of the Press." Speech delivered at the first Congress of Sociologists meeting, Frankfort, 1910. Translated by Hanno Hardt, Journal of Communication 26(3): 96-101.

Wolfe, Tom (1973). The New Journalism. New York: Harper & Row.

TEXTBOOKS

Burrows, William E.(1977). On Reporting the News. New York: New York University Press.

Brooks, Brian S. and George Kennedy, Daryl R. Moen and Ron Ranly (1980). News Reporting and Writing. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Charnley, Mitchell V. and Blair Charnley (1979). Reporting. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Crump, Spencer (1974). Fundamentals of Journalism. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.

Dennis, Everette E. and Arnold H. Ismach (1981). Reporting Processes and Practices. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.

Fedler, Fred (1984). Reporting for the Print Media. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

Friedlander, Edward Jay, Harry Marsh and Mike Masterson (1987). Excellence in Reporting. St. Paul: West Publishing Company.

Harriss, Julian, Kelly Leiter and Stanley Johnson (1981). The Complete Reporter. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co.

Hill, Evan and John J. Breen (1977). Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Hohenberg, John (1983). The Professional Journalist. Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Izard, Ralph S. and Hugh M. Culbertson and Donald A. Lambert (1977). Fundamentals of News Reporting. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

MacDougall, Curtis D. Interpretative Reporting (1982). New York: Macmillan Publishing

Mencher, Melvin (1984). News Reporting and Writing. Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown.

Rivers, William L. (1984). News in Print: Writing and Reporting. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Ward, Hiley H. (1985). Professional Newswriting. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.